



Press Release

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Social Security Inspector General Report: *Kindergarten through 12th Grade Schools’ Collection and Use of Social Security Numbers*

Despite the increasing threat of identity theft, K-12 schools’ collection and use of Social Security Numbers (SSNs) is widespread, according to a report from the Social Security Administration (SSA) Inspector General, Patrick P. O’Carroll, Jr.

Many K-12 schools use SSNs as the primary student identifier or for other purposes, even when another identifier would have sufficed, the Inspector General determined. In addition, there is a growing trend among State Departments of Education to establish longitudinal databases, which may include SSNs, of K-12 children in a State to track students’ progress over time.

While some State laws may require that K-12 schools collect SSNs in some instances, it seems some schools do so for convenience – because SSNs are unique identifiers and most students have an SSN. However, administrative convenience should never be more important than safeguarding children’s personal information, according to the Inspector General.

The unnecessary collection and use of SSNs is a significant vulnerability for this young population, according to the Inspector General. Recent data indicate the number of children under age 19 whose identities have been stolen is growing. This is particularly troubling given that some of these students may not become aware of such activity until they apply for a credit card or student loan.

Because of the numerous incidences of identity theft and the recognition that SSNs are linked to vast amounts of personal information, some States have taken steps to limit the collection and use of SSNs. The Inspector General applauds these efforts and believes State and local educational systems should seek additional ways to limit the collection and use of SSNs and implement stringent controls to protect SSNs when collected.

In response to the Inspector General’s report, SSA said, “...there are many risks associated with schools using SSNs as primary identifiers and we actively discourage use of SSNs.”

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADOBEPDF/A-08-10-11057.pdf>, or for additional information, contact Jonathan Lasher, Assistant Inspector General for External Relations, at (410) 965-7178.